Taking Refuge

By Thich Nhat Hanh

(Translated from Vietnamese into English by Sister True Emptiness)

Dear Sangha, today is the 4th of January and we are in the Winter Retreat. We are closing the chanting on Monday morning when we take refuge in ourselves, we are taking refuge in our own peace, and our happiness. When you read, "I take refuge in the Buddha in myself," you know right away that you are a happy person, because you know where you are going. You are going toward the energy of beauty, of goodness, of great understanding within yourself. So when you read "I take refuge in the Buddha in myself," you must be very happy, because you are confident that in you there is that wonderful energy of love, of peace, of great understanding. You may not yet be able to see them clearly but they are there. So when you read that, you must feel that " oh… I am that wonderful… I am that trust that I will be that Buddha… I will have that energy of peace, of love, of understanding. Of course in life things do not happen like we wish. So sometimes we feel a little bit irritated, angry. Sometimes we feel that we are restless and at the moment, right away, we should remember that within us there is the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha. That source of love, of great understanding within you. So when you decide to return to that source, you will feel right the confidence in you. Like Thay, in the past, has explained that the road between Boston and New York… let's say if you decide – please forgive me if you live in New York – let's say if Boston is the positive side, New York is the negative side. If you just turn your back to the New York side, and then you turn your head to the Boston side right away can you see that you are on the way to Boston. That means that you are on the way towards the positive place. Even if you are still in New York, even if you are still in the negative place. You decide to turn your face to Boston, even though you are still in New York, but you are already on the positive side, you are on the way to reach the Buddha Nature within yourself. But if you are in Boston and you turn your face to New York, to the negative side, then even though you are in Boston, you are also in New York. So on the road New York – Boston every point contains New York and Boston. So on the road from an angry, agitated, jealous person, on the way to become a Buddha, every place where you are, right here and now, you are at the same time both Buddha and Mara. And if you turn towards Buddha, right away you are Buddha or on the way to become a Buddha. Even if you are in a wonderful place, you are a Dharma teacher, you are a great teacher, but if you turn in the direction of anger, irritation, jealousy, craving, then you are on the way to Mara. Every point of the road contains both. Every moment, where you are, you contain both. So, "I take refuge in the Buddha, the one who shows me the way in this life." The historical Buddha is just a spiritual teacher who leads you on the way, who shows you the way, who shows you his own experience. The word dao su means the master of the path. He is sharing his path with you. He is only the showing of the path, dao means path. The word dao here means not only the word path, but in the Chinese character written below is the sign of the hand. It means the path with the hand… you take the hand of somebody else to lead him on the way. The character below is Su. Su means the teacher. So the teacher of the path. So you are a student of the Buddha and you have to remember, the Buddha first of all is somebody who guides. He's not a god. He's

not the creator. He's not the Lord/God. He's just your teacher. He just shares his own experience with you, to lead you on your own way. So when you start to read, "I take refuge in the Buddha," you must know that you turn to the direction of the Buddha within you, the wonderful source of love and peace and great understanding in you. Even if you are very angry at somebody, then you go back to your breath and you say, "I take refuge in the Buddha", that means "I take refuge in that wonderful source of love and peace." So right away in the very midst of irritation and anger, you are still on the way to become a Buddha… not a Buddha yet, but on the way. The word Buddha in Sanskrit… usually Indian people swallow the last syllable of this word… the Vietnamese pronounce "Bud-dha", the French also Bouddha. But in India, they always swallow this last syllable "Buddh…". So when it's transcribed into Thai, Vietnamese, we use the word "Buddh…" because the "a" is swallowed. Thay tried to explain that Buddhism… is the complement… it's like German, like Latin. The subject is Buddha but the complement is Buddham saranam. So Buddha saranam is I take refuge in the Buddha … and Buddham… because Buddha is no longer the subject but the complement. So when we recite "Buddham saranam gachami" - I take refuge in the Buddha. In English it's clearer because we say "I take refuge in the Buddha"… in the one who shows me the way in this life. I take refuge in the Dharma, the way of understanding and love. So Dharma here is defined as love and understanding. Maha Maitri Karuna means great compassionate love in Sanskrit is great understanding. So we can translate Dharma as great maitri karuna and Maha prajña, so it means great compassion, love and great understanding. So Dharma is something very clear, very concrete, because if you say that the Dharma is the Tripitaka is too large, we may summarize the entire teaching into great understanding, great compassion and great love. "I take refuge in the Sangha." Sangha is the community that lives in awareness. There are so many communities, but there is only one community who tries to live in awareness and in great understanding and love. Sangha is that community… because there are millions of communities in the world. But which community will try to live in harmony with each other, try to live in peace with each other, with great love and great understanding? That is the Sangha. So these three refuges (the updated Plum Village version that we are presently studying) is more complete that the three refuges in Pali or Sanskrit, because we have expanded the in order to make them clearer. Sometimes, when our friends read the Refuges in Pali or Sanskrit, they see that they are so short and they read a second or a third time. They repeat it three times. In the Pali text we see nine sentences, because each refuge is repeated three times - three times taking refuge in the Buddha, three times taking refuge in the Dharma, three times in the Sangha. Even if it looks complicated… it's only repeated three times: I take refuge in the Buddha, I take refuge in the Dharma, I take refuge in the Sangha. Like when you sing a song Breathing in, breathing out but you feel that is not enough, it will not impregnate you enough. So you sing it for the second time… When you take refuge in the Buddha, you feel peace, you're confident; you have trust … so you have the tendency to repeat it a second time, a third time. In our Vietnamese text or in the English text it seems more concrete, more complete. Because I take refuge in the Buddha, … the one who shows me the way. I take refuge in the Dharma, the way of understanding and love. I take refuge in the Sangha, the community that lives in harmony and awareness. We also feel that we need to repeat it. So in the text in the new chanting book, we have put it three times also. When you recite it the first time, you see clearly the act that you are turning to that direction of Boston instead of New York. It means in that direction of great understanding and love instead of anger, irritation and jealousy. That is the first time. The second time you repeat the same thing, but you feel that you have already taken refuge. The first time, you turn to that direction only. The second time, you are really embodying. … Your feet are already on that path. So having taken refuge in the Buddha I now have seen the way, I'm now on the way of great understanding and love. I'm on a wonderful way, full of light and full of beauty in this life. The first time, you turn to that direction, the second time, you repeat the same thing, but you feel that I already take refuge in the Buddha and so I am on the path of light and beauty. I look around and I see there are a lot of people who are in the same

conditions as me, even in better conditions than me. They don't know it and so they are not on the wonderful path full of light and beauty like me. So I feel so happy. And the second time I have already taken the refuge in the Dharma. I am learning the way to transform my negative energy, my bad character, my bad habits in order to touch finally my peace and my harmony within myself and others. I see that I am already on that path, I am already on the way to transform my pain, my difficulties. "Phap Mon" (Thay has written 2 Chinese characters on the whiteboard), Phap means dharma and Mon means the door - the door of the Dharma. The Dharma has 84,000 doors and sometimes this door is adequate, appropriate to this person, another door is appropriate to another person. One door is sitting meditation. There are a lot of people who only like sitting meditation; they take the door of sitting meditation. You like the door of walking meditation. Others like the door of watering the flowers; other people need trimming the tree. This means that there are so many doors in the world. And you only choose the appropriate door for the appropriate person. It's up to you to choose the door that is appropriate to you. If you don't like to eat hot chili, nobody can force you to eat hot chili. If you don't like to eat tomatoes, nobody can force you to eat tomatoes. It's the same for the Dharma. If you don't like sitting meditation, nobody can force you to sit. I am taking refuge in the Dharma; I'm learning many doors that can help me to transform my negative habits. I will not only transform superficially my way, but I will transform at the base, at the root of my negative habits. So I really try to transform the alaya vijnana - my store consciousness. I do not only try to transform myself superficially, but I try to transform at the level of my store consciousness. So now I take refuge in the Sangha. Having already taken refuge in the Sangha, I have the opportunity to be clear, to make my mind clear, thanks to the Sangha eyes. You have your personal eyes, but there are also collective eyes. The eyes of the Sangha are clearer than your eyes, your view. Your personal view is not deep enough. Everybody needs the Sangha eyes in order to shine on our personal narrow view. We do need the insight of others in order to help us to see things more clearly, using the Sangha eyes in order to help us to be deeper, to have a broader mind. I am living with the Sangha, I am profiting from the Sangha eyes in order to be deeper, in order to have a wider view. Living with the Sangha has that advantage. You need to frequently request the Sangha eyes to shine on your behavior so that you can see yourself clearer. We always try to see ourselves clearer, but we can never see enough. We do need the Sangha eyes in order to broaden our views, to deepen our views. If you have the Sangha beside you, on the left, on the right, you will not fall into negative energy that you regret later on. So the teaching of the Buddha is that you must stick to your Sangha in order for you to be more and more deep, more and more wise. When you decide to take refuge in the Sangha, you have a support. But when one day you decide to leave the Sangha, you must be aware that you are on a dangerous path. Like the tiger that decides to live in the jungle in order to go to the city... the tiger must be very alert. If not, the tiger will be killed. If we leave the Sangha we have to double our mindfulness, our awareness, so that you will not be thrown by the negative energies surrounding you. When you take refuge in the Sangha, you can feel the trust that living with the Sangha, you agree to listen to the Sangha eyes in order to transform yourself. Having already taken refuge in the Buddha, I am already on that wonderful path of light and beauty. Having already taken refuge in the Dharma, I am transforming all my negative energies. Having taken refuge in the Sangha, I have the whole Sangha who supports me, who shines awareness on me, helps to clear my mind and helps me to see more deeply. Now for the third recitation… as we recite them three times. The first time you turn towards the direction of beauty. The second time: you see that you have that light; you are on the path of light and peace. Now the third time. When you recite for the third time, you say, "I take refuge in the Buddha in myself and I vow that everybody sees their own Buddha Nature and see that they have their own ability to be like a Buddha, their own ability to become that source of love and peace and understanding. For the third time, having taken refuge in the Buddha already … and having trusted the Buddha Nature in you already, I vow, I wish that everybody will realize that they also have that source of great understanding and love, they also have that

Buddha in them. When I take refuge in the Buddha in me, I know that in me there is that wonderful light of peace, of understanding. I have a mind of love - the bodhicitta. As I have a lot of bodhicitta, I wish that everybody will realize that they also have that Buddha Nature, that nature of enlightenment, that everybody will see that they themselves are also light, the light of understanding and love. The nature of nature of enlightenment exists in everyone. But rare are the people who know that. The day when the Buddha realized for the first time that he had totally broken through all his confusion, and had become a Buddha, his first sentence was: "How strange, every living being has that Buddha Nature, has that nature of enlightenment, but they don't know and they continue to keep drowning in the ocean of suffering." That was the Buddha's first sentence. So the third time, we recite," I take refuge in the Dharma within myself". Usually you think that you learn the Dharma with a spiritual teacher. But in fact, the Buddha said, that the method exists already in you. In order to touch that source of peace, you have your own methods. You take refuge in the Dharma in yourself. This means you touch your own experience, because the Buddha shows you his experience and you have to discover your own experience. When you discover your own experience… I wish that everybody will also discover their own wonderful experience to transform their negative energy in order to become a Buddha. You have to discover your own experience to practice in order to touch your own Buddha. You wish that everybody can get a chance to touch their own experience of transformation in order to help themselves to become Buddha as soon as they can. When you discover your own experience it doesn't mean that you will not have attachments. Since you have attachments you say that every time I have an attachment, I have to practice like that in order to detach. You know that sometimes you are attracted by craving. When you find your own experience you say that every time I am stuck by craving, that is what I should do in order to discharge the craving in me. And if I am angry, then, in the past I have practiced and I have seen that every time I am angry or I'm on the way to get angry, that's the way I practice in order to be detached from my anger. So that is your own experience and you wish that everybody will discover their own experience in order to master themselves and to reach their Buddha Nature. I take refuge in the Sangha in me already; I vow that everybody can be a part of the four Sanghas like me. When you practice with the Sangha, you have the four Sanghas, because according to the tradition, around the Buddha there are always the four Sanghas: the Sangha of monks, the Sangha of nuns, the Sangha of laymen, the Sangha of laywomen. I live with the four Sanghas and I vow that in the future, everywhere people can also set up their own four Sanghas in order to protect them and help them on the way to becoming enlightened. When I take refuge in the Sangha in me, I wish that everybody has the ability to be a part of the four Sanghas in order to master all the four Sanghas …Nghiep (in Vietnamese) means to embrace, master, make one, one body… in order to be able to make four Sanghas into one body. There is no leak, no war in these four Sanghas. There is the atmosphere of peace, of harmony in these four Sanghas. I wish that everybody can be or to do like that.

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From now on, every time you read, "I take refuge in the Buddha, in the Dharma, in the Sangha," you have to read with a clear voice and you have to read with all your being. So that when you read the first time, you see that you are turning to the direction of beauty and goodness, to the Buddha in yourself. When you recite the second time you see that, having beauty and peace already, you wish that everybody can see like you, that means like the way we just explained. So you live three periods like I just explained about how I take refuge in the Buddha. When you read like that, verbally, loudly not only does it radiate for you, but it radiates for those who listen to you. There are those visible beings and there are invisible beings too, who can listen to you, to your voice. When you chant like that you should feel that the whole universe is listening to you, including yourself. This is the chanting of Monday evening. We will recite the ten vows of

Samantabhadra. The ten aspirations of Samantabhadra. (Thay reads in Vietnamese, the Opening verse for this section of chanting "Homage to the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas of the Avatamsaka Realm"). Avatamsaka means flower adornment, or flower garlands. These garlands of flowers are so precious that you cannot buy them in the market. In the dictionary they put the word wreath. Before the word Avatamsaka appeared, there was already another name for that sutra, called Yen.

Avatamsaka Sutra, the sutra, which adorns with garlands of flowers, is a very great sutra. This sutra appeared in the first century after Jesus Christ. Avatamsaka Sutra is a sutra of Mahayana Buddhism. You will not find it in the Pali Canon, because it appeared in the first century after J.C., written by a number of great patriarchs, great enlightened teachers. Gandhariyuha means adornment with perfume, more than flowers. In the beginning the name of this Sutra was adornment with perfume. In our Sangha there is one sister who has the name adornment with perfume and another is adornment with flowers like Huong Nghiem (Frafrant Adornment) and Hoa Hghiem (Flower Adornment). In the fifth century that sutra had been translated into Chinese. This sutra has been realized step by step, not right away like Lotus Sutra. In the beginning a number of patriarchs wrote an number of chapters and later on some enlightened teacher felt that it was not enough. So he added more in order to make it complete. The two first chapters in the primitive sutra were "Ten Stages" and "Entry into the stream of Reality"…in the past it was only two chapters. Now these two chapters are only two chapters among a lot of chapters of the Avatamsaka Sutra. But they are the most basic chapters. The Avatamsaka Sutra has been developed slowly. The version that we have today is totally complete, and has developed the concept of inter-being, inter-penetration and inter-connection to the highest and most profound level. It has become a jewel of humanity, not only a jewel of Buddhism. Because there are even those who don't know anything about Buddha, after reading that sutra have to agree that it is a real jewel of humanity. In that sutra you see inter-being nature, for example, in the flower you see the sunshine, you see the rain, you see the farmer, you see the earth, you see the minerals, you see the love, the care of the farmer etc. In that sutra you also see that the whole universe is a great flower and in that great flower there is a multitude of elements. And you see that the whole universe is condensed in one grain of dust and in one grain of dust you can see the whole universe. In the grain of dust you can see everything, million and million of elements of the cosmos. These are the two sentences we should remember: "One is everything and everything is one" and "The whole cosmos can be contained in a single grain of dust". Everyone is one or everyone could be condensed in one. The most famous personality in that sutra is Samantabhadra, like Manjusri Bodhisattva in the Prajñápáramitá Sutra. There are three main elements of the Avatamsaka Sutra. The first one is the prajña view, it means the view of great understanding… and then Great Action and Great Vow… it means a great insight. Insight, action and the eyes of wisdom… in many books you can see that it is translated by "the eyes of wisdom," the view of great understanding. … Hanh in Vietnamese is action and the vow… you vow to act like that, to do like that. Samantabhadra is the one who is great, who embodies these three main elements, the insight, the great action and the deep vow. The essence of the Avatamsaka Sutra is not only insight but also a vow, an aspiration, a great determination. Avatamsaka Sutra is also action, not only wishful thinking but the will to embody deep action, action accompanied by great understanding, not a blind action. We know that with that insight, with the insight of Avatamsaka Sutra, we can look into the world full of misery, of confusion, of discrimination, of anger, of racism, of suffering and we can see another world, the world where there is communication, there is no discrimination, where there is a lot of light and love. And it's strange that these two worlds are one. They are not separate. Look deep into the world of misery, of discrimination, of racism, of suffering and you can see the world of light, of great understanding, of love. The word Loka means the world. In Buddhism you can hear very often Loka and Lokadhatu, it means the world of suffering, the world of restlessness, the discriminating world. But then you hear another word, Dharmadhatu that is the

world where there is a lot of light, of flowers, of love, of understanding. But these two worlds are one. Some teachers used to think that when you practice very well, the day you will die, you will be reborn in the Dharmadhatu. That's not the way the Buddha taught it. The Buddha said that in this very world, Lokadhatu, you can touch the Dharmadhatu. In this very world, in this very moment, when you are full of anger, sadness, discrimination, you can look deeper and you can transform right away this very moment into the world of great understanding, love. People who see in a very superficial way can think that light is outside of the flower, the rain is outside of the flower, the farmer is outside of the flower. But if you look deeper you see that in the flower there is sunshine, there is rain, there is the farmer, there is love, there is care. If you can see like that, it is insight. Not only you see in the flower, the sunshine, the rain, the farmer, but you see also in the rain the sunshine, in the rain you see also the flower. This means that everything is interconnected deeply and vice versa…it is reciprocal. In the Lokadhatu you are different from the person that you love and you feel less good than the person you admire, better than the person you hate. But in the Dharmadhatu you see that you and the person you love are one and the person that you don't love are one too. The difference is whether you know how to use your insight, your wisdom eyes, or not. If you use your wisdom eyes then you see that the person you love is also you, the person you hate is also you. Then you will see that the weakness of the other person is also your weakness. Like when the right hand sees the weakness in the left hand, the right hand does not blame the left hand for its weakness. Wisdom eyes help us to see like that and then we go right away from Lokadhatu to Dharmadhatu. Sudhana is the young man who has received the order from Manjushri, his teacher, who said "You can go and study with every teacher among the 52 teachers." He did not say… "You are my student, you only learn with me." He allowed Sudhana to go and study with everybody, every teacher, including children and non-Buddhist teacher. Among the 52 teachers, people said that there was also the Lady Mahamaya, the mother of the Buddha. You have to touch earth deeply in order to touch Mahamaya, the mother of the Buddha Gautama. You must try to go and search for Mahamaya, which is the mother of the Buddha and then she can teach you a lot. Sudhana tried to go around and around search a lot but he couldn't find her. One-day people told him that he only had to touch her deeply in order to see her, not to go around. One day when he touched the earth deeply, suddenly he saw, springing from the earth, a great lotus with one thousand petals. And he saw himself sitting on one petal. But then he saw that the petal suddenly became another lotus with one thousand leaves. In each leaf he saw himself sit there. In that leaf petal, not in the petal of the flower, and he looked deeper and he saw that in that second step where he is in the petal of lotus, he sees himself again as a big lotus with one thousand petals… and so on. He looked more deeply and he saw Mahamaya sitting on another petal. He stayed in another petal of lotus, looking at him and smiled… And he himself is sitting on a lotus petal and this petal is transformed in a big lotus with one thousand petals. In each petal he is there and Mahamaya is also sitting there. This means countless ways to see from one countless things, petals. He is not less surprised when suddenly Mahamaya said "Young man, do you know, one day, when I was pregnant with my son Siddhartha, what do you think, I felt so happy and so light, full of happiness. You know that when Siddhartha Buddha just entered in my womb, I felt so peaceful. You know when in your womb there is a young Buddha, you'll be very happy, you'll be very light." And then Mahamaya said, "When my son Gautama Buddha just entered in my womb and I felt so happy and at that time there were countless bodhisattvas in ten thousand worlds coming and wishing to pay respect to my son. I had no time to think. I didn't know how I could fit them all inside me but all the bodhisattvas came in and visited him. I didn't have time to think and then all of them entered in my womb and there was still plenty of space. I didn't know that in my womb there was so much great space. Countless bodhisattvas were entering in my womb and my womb still had a lot of space to house all of them. Suddenly I felt that if countless other bodhisattvas wanted to enter in my womb, my womb still had space for all of them." It means that the infinitely small can contain the infinitely great. One Vietnamese Buddhist Zen monk said that you can

condense the whole universe and you can put it on the top of one hair. He said that the moon, the sun, the whole universe can be condensed and be put on the top of a hair. The ideas of small and big are only in the historical dimension, in the very superficial way to think and to see. If you look deeper you will see that the whole universe is contained in one. The way to describe that in the lotus with one thousand petals, there is one young man sitting there… and the young man will become the lotus with one thousand petals and so on. Then the lady said, "Do you know, I am the mother of all the Buddhas. I am not only the mother of the Buddha Gautama, but I am the mother of all the Buddhas now and I am the mother of all the Buddhas in the past and the mother of all the Buddha in the future. Then you know that you are also like me. You are also pregnant of one Buddha. Even though you are a boy. You still can be pregnant of a Buddha. And you are the father or the mother of all the Buddhas in the past, all the Buddhas in the present, all the Buddhas in the future. You have to take care of the Buddha in you. Don't have any guilt that you are dirty, because dirty is also a thought of discrimination… dirty/immaculate, high/low, good/bad because you are as great as Mahamaya. You are also the mother of all the Buddhas in the past, the present and the future. Because the infinitely small can contain the infinitely great.

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The sutra of ten aspirations of Samantabhadra is from the chapter thirty-six of Avatamsaka Sutra. The Ten aspirations and also ten actions of Samantabhadra. Body, spirit and mind in perfect oneness… I vow to purify my body, my spirit and my mind and touch deeply countless Buddhas. […] I try to purify my body, my spirit and my mind in order to touch countless Buddhas in all worlds in the ten directions. In order to touch these Buddhas I purify my body, to purify my spirit, to purify my mind. The word here is "I purify my body, I purify my spirit, I purify my mind in order to touch countless Buddhas. Body, spirit and mind are purified. These three are one. The three are purified. I touch deeply countless Buddhas. Hang Xa means the sand of the Ganges river… it means the number of Buddhas as numerous as the number of sand of the Ganges. In all the world, in the ten directions and in empty space, the third sentence is for expressing all the Buddhas in space. The fourth sentence is the past, the present and the future; this means the Buddha in time. Tap Phuong (ten directions) it means in space. Tam The means past, present, future … space and time… ten directions. The ten directions are: east, west, south, north, north-west, north-east, south-west, south-east, up and down. When you join your palms, you have to look deeply and see that all the Buddhas, countless Buddhas, as numerous as the number of sand grains of the Ganges River, in space and in time… And when you see like that, everywhere like that, then you may touch the earth. Don't touch the earth before you visualize that you are touching all these Buddhas in space and in time. Don't look in a very superficial way with you fresh view but with your insight view. When you touch one, you touch one time, but you touch countless Buddhas in space and in time. Space means the ten directions. The teaching of the Buddha is like the roaring of the lion. One of the names of the Buddha is " lion among men". I use my body, my mind and my spirit in order to touch all the Buddhas of the past, the present and the future. We are also a Buddha in the future and you see the Buddha but you are touching yourself. You are touching yourself is not because you are also a future Buddha. When you hear the bell, don’t touch the earth like a piece of meat. Touching the earth, you have to touch earth deeply, body, spirit and a great insight, to see that you touch millions of Buddhas in different directions and throw your piece of meat on the earth… flesh on the earth. The spiritual power of Samantabadhra enables me to be present everywhere; even if I stay here, I stand here. But thanks to the spiritual power of Samantabadhra, I will see myself everywhere in the world. In my superficial way to see things, in my confused way to see things, I think that I am only that unique person staying here. But with your deep spiritual power, thanks to the help of your deep insight, I can also see that I am everywhere. I see myself in the thousands of generations of my ancestors already

passed away. I see myself in thousands of generations of my descendants who have not appeared yet. But I see myself in all of them, in many thousand generations after now. I see myself in countless forms, in the trees and in the animals, in the rocks … everywhere. Thanks to the insight look of Samantabhadra I learn to have that insight look and I see that I am everywhere. I can see that I am everywhere. I am in my parents, in my great-grandparents, great-great-grandparents, in many thousand generations of my parents of blood family, of spiritual family, of land family. I see myself in my children and the descendants of my children, many thousand generations of my descendants, everywhere. Then I see myself in every living being. I don't know if you have experienced that some time … I look at the past and I see a number of bubbles and look deep in each bubble, there is my visage reflected then so if there are three hundred bubbles in the river, I see three hundred faces of myself in that. So we have to see ourselves like that. We see ourselves in every leaf, every tree, every flower, every rock, every piece of dirt, everything, everywhere. And we see ourselves in all our ancestors, in all our descendants. The one who bows and the one who is bowed to are of the same nature of emptiness. They are one. The one who bows and the one who is bowed, they are of the same nature of emptiness and so they are one. Like the flower and the light. The light is flower, the flower is light. When you look deeply into the flower, you see the light. When you look deeply into light, you see the flower. When you look deeply into a mother, you see a child. When you look deeply into the child, you see the mother. You cannot remove the mother out of the child, the child out of the mother. When you look deep like that into your anger against you mother, it will disappear. If you removed the one who bows, how could there be anything to be bowed to? You cannot separate them. The one who bows and the one who is bowed to are one. They are one because they have the same nature of emptiness. Empty men empty of a separate self. You cannot exist by yourself alone, you have to exist together with sunshine, rain, human beings, etc. You co-exist, empty of a separate existence. When you make body, speech and mind in oneness, in purity, you may touch the earth, then you will see that you are everywhere, you are touching the Buddha. This means you in the tree are touching the Buddha, you in the flower are touching the Buddha. You are in the excrement and you are touching the Buddha. You are in the … (?), are touching the Buddha. You are your brother who is touching the Buddha. When I was sixteen years old, in the Buddhist temple, I learned like that and I chanted a lot, but I didn't understand quite well until lately. when I entered in the monastery I perfectly but I didn't understand like that. I read like a parrot, but I didn't understand anything. I touched the earth, I stood there like I was in Indra’s Net. This is the net that is made with millions of jewels, or gems. So the place where I was standing, was like a net of millions of gems, they call it Indra’s Net. My body is reflecting countless Buddhas. So when I am touching the earth there are millions of me who are touching the earth, touching millions of Buddhas, millions of me touching millions of Buddhas. In front of every Buddha there is me who is touching the earth, paying respect to that Buddha. The spiritual power of Samantabhadra just as it is impossible to count the number of Buddhas, in the same way, it is also impossible to count how many me’s are bowing to these Buddhas. I have, therefore, no guilt, and no feeling of inferiority. I am equal like the Buddha. However many Buddhas there are, there is also the same number of myself.

Thanks to the spiritual power of Samantabhadra I can be everywhere. Wherever there is a Buddha, there is me, who touches the Buddha Nature of that Buddha. How many grains of dust are there in France, in Great Britain, in Germany or in every country throughout the world? They are countless. Because the number of Buddhas are as numerous as all the dust of all the world, France, Italy, Germany, etc. Everywhere, how many grains of dust like that, how many me? How many Buddhas like that? How many countless me touching countless Buddhas? Now I am one body touching one Buddha. But then I see myself in countless bodies touching countless Buddhas. In the Vietnamese text it's easy. Wherever there is a Buddha, there is me. In a grain of dust there are countless Buddhas. When we say a grain of dust, it means the infinitely

small atom. Now there are people who use the word atom or elementary particle. In an elementary particle there are countless Buddhas. Each of these Buddhas has his/her own Sangha. When we look into a grain of dust, we see countless Buddhas and each Buddha has his or her own Sangha, his/her own four Sanghas. In each pore of your hair you can also see ten thousand Buddha Worlds. In each Buddha World there are also four Sanghas. In the Avatamsaka Sutra it is explained this way. In every small grain of dust you can see countless Buddhas and each Buddha has his/her own world with all four Sanghas. My faith is very strong, it is very complete, it is very total. I believe strongly that I am here and I am also everywhere. I am in the infinitely small as well as in the infinitely great. This also helps to explain the character of interpenetration. When you see one in everything, there in a small thing [you see] the infinitely great and in the infinitely great [you see] one, you are entering into the Dharmadhatu, the world of light and beauty instead of suffering and misery. Every Buddha is sitting with stability in his/her own world with his own four Sanghas. My belief, my strong belief, my total belief in the presence of these Buddhas is very firm.

Now we go to the next paragraph, which speaks about praising the Buddha. You must think to yourself: "I am the ocean of sound in order to radiate, to radiate all the wonderful sounds in order to praise the merit of the Buddhas, in the past, present and countless lives in the future. Thay is reading a number of his poems also praising the Buddha - *the Buddha is like the full moon, shining a lot of light, shining a lot of compassion, etc*. He evokes the number of his poems praising the Buddha and there is also one paragraph praising the Buddha in the Avatamsaka Sutra. We can ask ourselves, "Does Buddha need us to praise him?" He does not have a self. Why does he need us to praise him a lot? He didn't want to be praised. But our tendency is to touch the earth and praise the Buddha. When we praise the Buddha with all his qualities, we are going in that direction, because we know that we also have that Buddha Nature. Every quality that we give to the Buddha, we see that we have that quality too. It doesn't mean that the Buddha wants to be praised. He doesn't care. But we do need to praise him in order to remind ourselves that we also have these qualities. In that paragraph it's said that I use all the oceans of sound in order to praise, to radiate in a very wonderful way in order to praise the merits of a Buddha. A Buddha's store of merits are full in the past, the present and the future. In order to express something very deep, very profound, we use the image of an ocean or sea. Because you praise the Buddha so much, you have to use a smile like an ocean of sound in order to praise the Buddha. We need an ocean of sound in order to praise the Buddha enough. Our happiness is so great. We also use the image of the ocean in order to express the great depth of our happiness or the great depth of our admiration. I am using the ocean of sound to praise the Buddha with all his merits. I would like not only to praise him now, but also to continue to praise him for countless lives in the future. So now is not enough time for me to praise you. I want to continue to praise you for many countless lives in the future. That is the meaning of the four sentences. That is about that paragraph, the fourth paragraph of the Ten Vows of Samantabhadra. I am using the ocean of sound in order to express countless wonderful words in order to praise the ocean of merit of the Buddha, not only now, but for countless lives in the future. The very deep ocean of merit of the Buddha. It's simpler to follow the Vietnamese text, it's clearer. I take the most wonderful garland of flowers with a lot of fragrance, a lot of perfume, a lot of music, a lot of parasols in order to offer to the Buddha. This paragraph is about offering. I decide to go and offer to all the Buddhas the most wonderful garlands of flowers, the best perfume, the best music and the best parasols in a very beautiful way. … Garlands of the most wonderful flowers, fragrance, incense, music and parasols. Of course, when we offer to the Buddha we will not offer the kind of sad music that makes you feel that all your intestines are cut into small pieces. We have to offer to the Buddha the most light, the most wonderful music.

[Bell]

In the infinitely small, is contained the infinitely great. So even one infinitely small idea of goodness in you can move the infinitely great world [end of tape 1]

… infinite anger in you can also disturb the infinitely big world. So we have to be very aware of that.)

I take the first class garlands of flowers, the most wonderful garland of flowers, the fragrance, the best incense, the best music, the best parasols to offer to the Buddha, to the Tathágata. Food, robes and fragrant flowers, torches and mats on which to sit. They are all here in plenty as we offer to the Tathágata. Clothes, food… Every kind of cloth, every kind of flower, every kind of incense, every kind of torch or seat we will offer. It is the way we offer in our insight in which we use our insight when we offer something that determines the value of that act of offering. It's not because you give a lot of offerings that you have more merit. It is your way of offering that obtains a lot of merit. In the past there was one very poor beggar, an old woman. She only had a small amount of oil to offer to the Buddha. But the lamp of that woman continued to shine the whole night, while the prince and princess offered a lot of money for the oil in order to honor the Buddha, but all the lamps went out very soon. Only the one cent oil of that beggar women lasted very long. Because she had offered that with all her being. So that offering was so great that the oil lasted. Nobody could extinguish that lamp, until one day when Shariputra had to use magic power to extinguish it. This means that when you offer something with all your being, it's not the quantity that counts, it's your whole being. Clothes, flowers, incense, torch and seats … I offer with my whole being, with my deep insight to all Buddhas. In the Chinese text it is said that the number of things I offer to you are so numerous that, if piled up they would form a very high mountain… plenty of clothing, plenty of flowers, plenty of incense, plenty of torches, plenty of seed I want to offer to you. And we offer our deep trust to the Buddha, our deep confidence to the Buddha. The next paragraph is: "I use my large and deep insight in order to offer to you, the Tathágata." Tanh Giai means my insight and my solid belief and my great trust in you and in the Buddha in the ten directions and in the past, the present and the future… to offer to you. If I can offer my insight and deep confidence in this way, it is more important than food, clothing and other things. That paragraph is: "I use my deep insight, my strong belief, my strong trust in the Buddhas in the three times, i.e. the past, the present, the future." It's thanks to the spiritual of the S* that I can offer to all the Buddhas my deep insight as well as my strong belief in the Buddha. So I and Samantabhadra are one. It's thanks to that spiritual power of Samantabhadra in me that I can offer my deep insight, my strong belief in the Buddhas in the three times, past, present and future. Now the next paragraph (it's about beginning anew) : "In the past I have created a lot of negative habits and negative Karma." From my previous lives I have created a lot of negative Karma, because of my craving, because of my anger, because of my confusion and my ignorance. Since time immemorial … from the beginning-less time I have had a lot of anger, a lot of craving, a lot of confusion. From the no-beginning, from immemorial time I have been craving, I have been angry, I have been ignorant… and I have created a lot of negative Karma by my words, by my body and by my thoughts. May I decide to begin anew. Now I decide to stop all these things in order to begin anew. Since immemorial time, from my body, from my speech, from my mind I have created a lot of negative Karma, because of craving, because of anger, because of ignorance. Today I decide to stop them all and to begin anew. Now we arrive at the next paragraph. …to rejoice together with others. When you have done something good, you are joyful. But when we practice this, if somebody is successful, we feel that it is our success, we are joyful together with him. If you fail an exam that your sister succeeds, you train yourself to be joyful with her success. You don't discriminate… "oh, she's successful, I am not, I am so mad". No discrimination. You are joyful with her. If somebody has done wonderful work, you are so joyful for him and for you too. Because you feel that you and him/her are one. I see that you are treasured by Thay, so I behave in a very helpful way because I am very joyful for you, I'm not jealous of you. You are respected by

people, I am joyful with you, for being respected by people. I will not be jealous of you. This means you are joyful with the joy of others, you are not jealous, you will not say: "What you are joyful is mean." I don't feel any jealousy. Rejoicing together with others is a very good medicine against jealousy. You are joyful with the joy of others. You are joyful with the success of others. If you receive the lamp transmission from Thay, I'm so happy because Thay gave the lamp to you, I feel that it is as if he gave the lamp to me. I'm not jealous. I am joyful with the joy of all the merits; people have done in ten thousand directions. In ten thousand directions there are countless people who practice merit. Every merit done by others, I feel that it's my merit. I feel so joyful, so happy. If you are jealous of that person, because every day there are countless others who achieve a lot of merits and if you start to be jealous of this one and this one and that it will be endless jealousy. So that is medicine against jealousy. I see countless living beings in ten thousand directions, who have done a lot of merit, I feel joyful, I feel happy as if I was doing that work. Those who are Vo hop means you don't need study more. You are already achieved you don't need to learn. You are already achieved people. In our case, we need to learn more, we need to train ourselves more. But in this sutra Vo hop means these people don't need to learn anything. They are already achieved people. … two opposite significations. There are those who … need to be trained and there are those who don't need to be trained. They are already achieved people. They are… all the Tathágata, all the bodhisattvas. All the world's living beings in the ten thousand directions, people who need to be trained and those who are already achieved. … Sravaka means, those who need the teaching in order to be enlightened. Those who need to listen in order to be enlightened, who need to be trained by listening. They need to learn directly from the teaching of the Buddha. Those who need to listen directly to the teaching of the Buddha. Pratyeka Buddhas are those who become Buddha by themselves. They don't need to be trained by anyone. They look deeply and they see the interconnection, interpenetration of all things. And they develop their own insight. All the Tathágatas and all the bodhisattvas, if they do any merit, I feel that it's my merit. I feel joyful, exactly like as if I had done that. Any merit they can obtain, I will be very happy for them, exactly as if I had this merit. You only need to practice that and then you will be happy already. If your brother in the Dharma is loved by Thay, you feel that you are loved by Thay. You don't need to be jealous with him. If your sister has done a great work, you are so joyful with her success; you don't need to be jealous. Now the sixth action. The fifth is to be joyful with the merits of others, no jealousy. Now we arrive to the sixth action of Samantabhadra: Invite people to practice. When the Buddha first was enlightened, he hesitated. He said, "What I just discovered is so wonderful. But I am wondering if people can understand me. Maybe it's a waste of time if I explain they will not trust me, they won't believe. So maybe it's not good for me to share. I just enjoy my peace and my harmony. That's enough." But finally he decided to go. When you hear that there is a place where great people are, doing wonderful work, we have to invite others to join and to do that wonderful work also. The lamp of the world, it means those who are very wise…. wise personalities, we call them the lamp of the world. If the world is full of confusion, if you can see one lamp of the world, you have to come and beg these people come and save the world. In the ten directions, wherever I see a lamp of the world, i.e. wherever I see a wise man, or a number of those who have just been enlightened, even if they are newly enlightened, I will also come to them and beg them to teach, to go out and teach people. The one who is already enlightened, the one who's just enlightened, whenever I see them, I have to come and beg them to go out and share their own experiences, turn the wheel of the Dharma, i.e. invite them to share the Dharma with others, share their own experience of wisdom with the world. Wherever you see enlightened people, or newly enlightened people, you still try to reach him/her and invite him/her to come out and to share the Dharma with people. So you invite when we see unsurpassable people, when we see these lamps of the world, or we see those who are newly enlightened, I will come and beg them to turn the wheel of the Dharma, i. e. to go and share their experience. All the Buddhas said that … "Oh, I already have taught enough. Now I want to go to Nirvana, I don't want to teach more." So you have to

come and beg these Buddhas and say, "Please don't go to Nirvana. Please come and stay a few more years in order to help countless people, who are still in confusion." Wherever there is a number of Buddhas who want to enter into Nirvana, you go and make them come out and work again for those who suffer. Beg the Buddhas to agree to stay, not to stop the work yet. The seventh action is: Inviting all the Buddhas to remain and to teach, not to retire. For those who are enlightened, like Buddha, they are not victims of birth and death. For them … they are already light, they are already the source of light. For them, if people see them pass away, they pretend to pass away. When they are born, they pretend to be born. But they are already that source of light and peace. They pretend to be born, they pretend to die. But they do not really die and are not really born. So when you look into the birth you see the death, you look deep into the death, you see the birth. You pretend to die you pretend to be born. In the Lotus Sutra there is the story of one physician who comes back home and who sees a number of his children who have been poisoned. They are severely poisoned and are dying quickly. But when he prepares some medicine for his children, some say, "Oh, I will not die yet. I will continue to eat this poisonous food." Then the father pretends to die. All the children are shocked that he is dying already… "So I'd better stop eating this poisonous thing and drink some of the medicine he prepared for me. Because if he passes away then nobody can help me." So he pretended to die. Many Buddhas are like that. They pretend to die. So all these Buddhas pretend to be born, to die." Last year in the Stoughbridge retreat in the UK, I told during Easter "Don't be so sad. Jesus only pretended to die. He did not really die." That was a praise from my part. But some Christians were very shocked, they said, "How do you dare to tell me that Jesus pretended to die?" And that is a phrase. Because Jesus can never die, he pretended to die. Because his twelve disciples were too superficial, they did not look deeply and so they thought that he died. You too, you do not try to practice. So one day I'll pretend to die, for you to practice better. So we know that the Buddha pretend to die, but we come and we say that "Please, we are still very confused, we still have a lot of craving, we need you to spend one more year with us, two more years, four more years…" We come and beg, request the Buddha to stay and not to die yet. So that is a very important practice in order to invite the Buddha to stay. We know that without the Buddha we will feel lost. So we beg the Buddha to remain with us in order for us to be solid. To those who are pretending to die, we sincerely request them to stay longer with us, in order to bring more teachings to the living beings.